

CERTIFICATIONS IN TEXAS A GENERAL OVERVIEW

KAMERON D. JOHNSON
TRAVIS COUNTY JUVENILE PUBLIC DEFENDER
2201 POST ROAD, SUITE 200
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78704
OFFICE 512.854.4128 | FACSIMILE 512.854.4148
EMAIL: kameron.johnson@traviscountytexas.gov

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
History of Juvenile Courts.....	1
Certification Eligibility.....	3
Perjury.....	4
Certifications Under Age 18	4
Certifications Over Age 18.....	5
Certifications for Capital Murder & Murder	7
Due Process & Constitutional Safeguards	7
Notice Requirements	7
Criminal Transactions.....	8
Diagnostic Study& Social Evaluation	9
Investigation.....	10
Hearings	11
Right of Counsel.....	12
Evidence	12
Factors to be Considered by Court	13
Judicial Findings	14
Required Findings.....	15
Community Welfare Provision.....	16
Criminal Transactions.....	16
Mandatory Certifications	16
Orders	17
Miscellaneous Transfers	17
Appeals	18
Conclusion.....	19

Certifications in Texas a General Overview

I. Introduction

On the fifth of September an intruder entered a woman's apartment, stole her wallet and then proceeded to sexually assault her.¹ While conducting an investigation the police found latent fingerprints during a search of the victim's apartment. The prints were developed and processed and after comparisons the prints were discovered to match the fingerprints of Morris Kent. Morris' prints happened to be on police file because they were taken by police when he was 14 years old. At about 3 p.m. on September 5, Morris Kent who was then 16 was taken into custody by the police. Upon being apprehended, Morris was taken to police headquarters where he was interrogated by police officers. After being interrogated by police it appears that Morris admitted his involvement in the offense which led to his apprehension and volunteered information as to similar offenses involving housebreaking, robbery, and rape. His interrogation proceeded from about 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. the same evening.

Approximately two weeks after being taken initially taken into custody, Morris was indicted by a grand jury. The indictment contained eight counts: "alleging two instances of housebreaking, robbery, and rape, and one of housebreaking and robbery." Morris' case was taken to trial and a jury found Morris "not guilty by reason of insanity" as to the rape charges and guilty on the burglary and robbery charges. Morris was sentenced to serve five to fifteen years on each count or a total of 30 to 90 years in prison. Morris appealed his case which eventually was litigated all the way to the United States

Supreme Court.

In reversing Morris' conviction, the Supreme Court, in a landmark decision opined "[i]t is clear beyond dispute that the waiver of jurisdiction is a 'critically important' action determining vitally important statutory rights of the juvenile."² The Supreme Court's decision in *Kent* was landmark in that for essentially the first time the Supreme Court applied principles of fundamental fairness and due process to juvenile proceedings.

II. *History of Juvenile Courts*

Beginning in the late nineteenth century juvenile justice reform took place nationwide which established separate criminal justice systems for children and adults. In Texas the first school for juvenile offenders was established beginning in 1889. The genesis of the Texas juvenile schools was based on the principal that "[c]hildren who are in danger of maturing into adult criminals should be rescued – not by imposing on them the disabilities that result from criminal conviction, but by placing them in protective environments and teaching them about discipline, morality, values and productive work."³ Prior to 1889 most states treated children over the age of seven the same as they treated adults in criminal prosecution. During this period children were sentenced to lengthy periods of incarceration in prisons along with adults. Beginning in the late nineteenth century juvenile justice reform was enacted that established separate juvenile courts. The country's first distinct juvenile court was established in Chicago in 1899 with the statutory purpose that the court would handle

¹ *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. 541, 543-44, 86 S. Ct. 1045, 1048 (1966).

² *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. at 556.

³ See generally, Michele Deitch, Rebecca Breeden &

Ross Weingarten, *Seventeen, Going on Eighteen: An Operational and Fiscal Analysis of a Proposal to Raise the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction in Texas*, 40 Am. Crim. L. Rev. 1 (2012).

children under the age of sixteen and would serve a rehabilitative, rather than punitive purpose. Separate juvenile courts have operated in the United States for well over a century however every state has a procedure for trying juveniles as adults or transferring their cases to adult court. Here in Texas, in 1918, the legislature raised the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from thirteen to seventeen years old. Essentially meaning that beginning at the age of seventeen individuals who commit criminal offenses are treated as adults for all purposes in the criminal justice system.

The process of trying juveniles as adults is available in every state in the country. States vary on the requirements of trying juveniles as adults however there exist three basic types of procedures or hearings to transfer juveniles to adult court. The most prevalent type of statute to transfer juveniles to adult court is judicial waiver. Judicial waiver is the process which a juvenile court judge makes the determination to transfer a child to adult court after a hearing. By far judicial waiver is the most common type of transfer or certification.⁴

Automatic waiver, legislative waiver or sometimes referred to as statutory exclusion is the transfer process

where certain offenses alleged to have been committed by juveniles are statutorily excluded from juvenile court and original jurisdiction rests with the criminal court. Over half the states in the country have this process. Commonly referred to as automatic waiver because these statutes remove juvenile court jurisdiction “automatically” and no motion or request from the State or even a decision by the juvenile court judge is required.⁵ This is the general practice in Texas for youth who commit criminal offenses beginning at the age of seventeen. Youth who are seventeen or older are automatically charged in the adult system for committing criminal offenses.⁶

Another process for trying youth as adults is direct file. Direct file, is the transfer process which gives the prosecution the discretion to determine whether to proceed in juvenile court or criminal court against the juvenile. Direct file places sole discretion with the prosecutor to determine if proceedings will be initiated in juvenile court or criminal court.⁷

In 1973 the Texas legislature promulgated Title III of the Family Code. The enactment of Title III was in response in part to a penumbra of reasons: United

⁴ Nearly all states have *judicial waiver* provisions, in which juvenile court judges clear the way for criminal court prosecutions by waiving jurisdiction over individual juveniles. Under a waiver law, a case against an offender of juvenile age must at least originate in juvenile court; it cannot be channeled elsewhere without a juvenile court judge's formal approval. While all states prescribe standards that must be consulted in waiver decision-making, most leave the decision largely to the judge's discretion (46 states). However, some set up presumptions in favor of waiver in certain classes of cases (12 states), and some even specify circumstances under which waiver is mandatory (13 states). See, Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & Statistics. Online. Available: <http://www.jjgps.org/jurisdictional-boundaries#compare-transfer-provisions?age=->

1&action=2&year=2016&state=52&offense=-1. Developed by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ), with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. (last visited January 5, 2022).

⁵ Twenty-eight states have *statutory exclusion* provisions that grant criminal courts original jurisdiction over certain classes of cases involving juveniles. Legislatures in these states have essentially predetermined the question of the appropriate forum for prosecution-taking the decision out of both prosecutors' and judges' hands. *Id.*

⁶ Tex. Penal Code §8.07.

⁷ Fourteen states have *direct file* laws, which leave it up to prosecutors to decide, at least in specified classes of cases, whether to initiate cases in juvenile or criminal courts. *Id.*

State Supreme Court cases, increases in juvenile crime and an overall desire for Texas officials to be progressive.⁸ The initial goals of Title III were to provide for “the care, the protection, and the wholesome moral, mental and physical development of children coming within its provisions; to protect the welfare of the community and to control the commission of unlawful acts of children; consistent with the protection of the public interest, to remove from children committing unlawful acts the taint of criminality and the consequences of criminal behavior and to substitute a program of treatment, training, and rehabilitation; to achieve the foregoing purposes in a family environment whenever possible, separating the child from his parents only when necessary for his welfare or in the interest of public safety and when a child is removed from his family, to give him the care that should be provided by parents; to provide a simple judicial procedure through which the provisions of Title III are executed enforced and in which the parties are assured a fair hearing and their constitutional and other legal rights recognized and enforced.”⁹

In Texas the judicial waiver process is used in removing juveniles to adult criminal court and is referred to as discretionary transfer, waiver of jurisdiction, C & T, or most commonly certification. Discretionary transfer to criminal court or certification allows a juvenile judge to make the determination whether a juvenile respondent is transferred from the juvenile system to the

adult criminal system. Although certifications account for a relatively small percentage of proceedings in juvenile court they are considered extremely important hearings in that the juvenile court is making a decision to completely waive its jurisdiction and transfer a respondent to adult criminal court.¹⁰

Proceedings in juvenile court are considered civil in nature and have been designed to remove the “taint of criminality from children” and to focus on treatment, training and rehabilitation of the child.¹¹ Generally once a juvenile is certified to stand trial as an adult all of the protections available in the juvenile system are lost and the adult system takes over.

Texas law establishes basically three types of transfer or waiver of jurisdiction proceedings: hearings where the juvenile respondent is under the age of eighteen at the time of the hearing; hearings where the respondent is an adult or over the age of eighteen at the time of the commencement of the hearing; and the mandatory certification where a child has previously been certified and commits a new eligible offense while still under the age of seventeen.

III. *Certification Eligibility*

The certification proceedings are initiated by the State filing a motion or petition for discretionary transfer and the issuance of a summons. The minimal requirements necessary for certification bestow on State prosecutors a wide range of discretion in determining which cases to

⁸ 29 THOMAS S. MORGAN, TEXAS PRACTICE, JUVENILE LAW AND PRACTICE §1 (1985).

⁹ See original TEX. FAM. CODE §§51.02 (1-5). Amended.

¹⁰ The number of certification proceedings has shown a dramatic decrease over the last two decades; Texas Juvenile Justice Department data show 589 actual certifications occurred in 1996

compared to 143 certifications in 2016. *See generally*, Robert O. Dawson, Texas Juvenile Law § 10 (9th ed. 2018). See also, “Who Gets Certified? An Empirical Study of Discretionary Transfers from Juvenile to Criminal Court” Robert O. Dawson, Juvenile Law Section Report December 2002; Texas Juvenile Justice Annual Report to the Governor 2016.

¹¹ TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.01.

seek certification. However, certifications are usually limited to the more serious offenses, juveniles with chronic delinquent history, or individuals over eighteen who are accused of committing offenses when they were younger than seventeen.

The juvenile court has exclusive jurisdiction over nearly all criminal offenses committed by juveniles.¹² Texas Penal Code §8.07(b) states:

[u]nless the juvenile court waives jurisdiction under Section 54.02, Family Code, and certifies the individual for criminal prosecution or the juvenile court has previously waived jurisdiction under that section and certified the individual for criminal prosecution, a person may not be prosecuted for or convicted of any offense committed before reaching 17 years of age except an offense described by Subsections (a)(1)-(5).¹³

It is important to note that the age limitation is considered jurisdictional.¹⁴ Article 4.18 requires that a defendant or underage child raise the issue of being underage by written motion and the issue must also be presented to the district court judge.¹⁵ If the issue of underage is not raised by written motion in district court then the issue will be considered waived.

¹² See generally, TEX. PEN. CODE 8.07(a)(1)-(5). TEX. PEN. CODE § 8.07(a)(7) was enacted in 2001 to eliminate a potential defense to prosecution under TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(j)(2)(A), and now permits prosecution in criminal court of a person eighteen or older charged with murder or capital murder allegedly committed between the ages of ten and fourteen. TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.03(c) (providing exception for perjury). TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.04(a); *In the Matter of N.J.A.*, 997 S.W.2d 554 (Tex. 1999).

¹³ TEX. PEN. CODE 8.07(b).

¹⁴ See generally, TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. Art. 4.18.

¹⁵ *Id.*; *Rushing v. State*, 85 S.W.3d 283,286 (Tex.

IV. *Perjury*

Generally, the age limits for juvenile court to have original jurisdiction of a child exists between the ages of ten and seventeen.¹⁶ However, a general exception to this provision deals with perjury offenses.¹⁷ The Family Code §51.03 states “[n]othing in this title prevents criminal proceedings against a child for perjury.”¹⁸ Texas Penal Code §8.07 provides that perjury and aggravated perjury cases may be prosecuted in adult court even against defendants under the age of fifteen.¹⁹

V. *Certifications Under Age Eighteen*

Section 54.02 of the Family Code establishes when a child under eighteen may be transferred to adult court. Section 54.02 generally sets forth three requirements for transfer to adult court:

1. the child is alleged to have violated a penal law of the grade of felony and meets the minimum age for the charged offense;
2. no adjudication hearing has been conducted concerning that offense;
3. after a full investigation and a hearing, the juvenile court finds that: there is probable cause to believe that the child committed the offense, and because of the

Crim. App. 2002); *Adams v. State*, 161 S.W.3d 113 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 2004); *Mays v. State*, No. 01-03-01345-CR, 2005 Tex. App. Lexis 3842 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist] 5/19/05 unpublished).

¹⁶ See, TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.03.

¹⁷ TEX. PEN. CODE § 8.07(a)(1); See also., *Ponce v. State*, 985 S.W.2d 594 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.], *no pet.*) (affirming a criminal conviction for aggravated perjury committed by 13 year old without court having conducting a certification hearing).

¹⁸ TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.03

¹⁹ TEX. PEN. CODE § 8.07.

seriousness of the offense alleged or the background of the child, the welfare of the community requires criminal proceedings.²⁰

VI. Certifications Over Age Eighteen

The Texas Family Code establishes when a respondent age eighteen or over and is alleged to have committed an offense prior to the age of seventeen may be certified or transferred to adult criminal court as follows:

1. the person is eighteen or older;
2. the person was ten or older and under seventeen at the time he or she allegedly committed a capital felony or murder; fourteen or older and under seventeen at the time he or she allegedly committed an aggravated controlled substance felony or a first degree felony other than murder, or fifteen or older and under seventeen at the time he or she allegedly committed a second or third degree felony or a state jail felony;
3. no adjudication concerning the alleged offense has been made or no adjudication hearing concerning the offense has been conducted;
4. the juvenile court finds from a preponderance of the evidence that: for a reason beyond the control of the State, it was not practicable to proceed before the

person's eighteenth birthday, or after due diligence of the State, it was not practicable to proceed before the person's eighteenth birthday because the State did not have probable cause to proceed and new evidence has been found since the person's eighteenth birthday; the person could not be found; or a previous transfer order was reversed on appeal or set aside by a district court; and the juvenile court determines that there is probable cause to believe that the person before the court committed the offense alleged.²¹

In certification hearings involving respondents over the age of eighteen the court only has authority to either waive its jurisdiction or if jurisdiction is not waived to dismiss the State's petition or motion to transfer and any petition seeking to adjudicate the respondent delinquent.²²

One of the primary elements of the State's burden in these hearings is providing justification for the delay beyond the respondent's eighteenth birthday.²³ In these types of transfer hearings where the State is initially proceeding after the eighteenth birthday of the respondent demonstrating due diligence is mandatory for the State to meet its burden of transfer. If the State cannot justify the delay in proceeding prior to the juvenile turning eighteen the juvenile court has no

²⁰ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(a).

²¹ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(j).

²² Robert O. Dawson, TEXAS JUVENILE LAW § 10 (9th ed. 2018).

²³ In justifying a delay the court in *In the Matter of N.M.P.*, stated [w]e find no authority ... holding that the State must search out and use new, unproven scientific theories or test to meet the due

diligence requirement. To the contrary, the law requires the State to show that novel scientific evidence is reliable, and thus probative and relevant.... The State would be in an untenable position if it were required to prove that a cutting edge scientific test was reliable when the experts were still developing and refining the technology. *In the Matter of N.M.P.*, 969 S.W.2d 95,99 (Tex. App.—Amarillo 1998, no pet.).

jurisdiction to transfer.²⁴ Establishing due diligence is a jurisdictional matter and no harm analysis is necessary.²⁵

The court in *Webb*, held it is incumbent upon the State to file and conclude the certification hearing before the respondent's eighteenth birthday.²⁶ In *Webb*, the court opined that the meaning of "proceeding" in juvenile court, meant concluding the hearing before the respondent's eighteenth birthday, agreeing with the trial court.²⁷

The certification provisions establish four justifications for the delay as follows:

1. not practicable to proceed before age eighteen;
2. new evidence discovered;
3. respondent could not be found;
4. appellate reversal of certification order

Further in a recent opinion the Court of Criminal Appeals stated the factors for a juvenile court to consider in certifications over eighteen or certifications held pursuant to Section 54.02(j).²⁸ The *Thomas* Court held that transfer of an adult who committed the felony as a child occurs under Section 54.02(j) which provides:

- (j) The juvenile court may waive its exclusive original jurisdiction and transfer a person to the

appropriate district court or criminal district court for criminal proceedings if:

- (1) the person is 18 years of age or older;
- (2) the person was 15 years of age or older and under 17 years of age at the time he is alleged to have committed a felony;
- (3) no adjudication concerning the alleged offense has been made or no adjudication hearing concerning the offense has been conducted;
- (4) the juvenile court finds from a preponderance of the evidence that after due diligence of the state it was not practicable to proceed in juvenile court before the 18th birthday of the person because: (A) the state did not have probable cause to proceed in juvenile court and new evidence has been found since the 18th birthday of the person; or (B) the person could not be found; and
- (5) the juvenile court determines that there is probable cause to believe that the child before the court

²⁴ See generally, *Moore v. State*, 446 S.W.3d 47 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 2014); *In the Matter of N.M.P.*, 969 S.W.2d 95 (Tex. App.—Amarillo 1998)(new DNA testing became available after the respondent turned eighteen); *In the Matter of J.C.C.*, 952 S.W.2d 47 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1997)(State unable to provide justification for not proceeding against respondent before turning eighteen when it proceeding against his twin brother for the same offense prior to the twin brother turning eighteen).

²⁵ See, *Webb v. State*, unpublished, No. 08-00-00161-CR, 2001 WL 1326894, Juvenile Law Newsletter 01-4-45 (Tex. App.—El Paso 10/25/01). In *Webb*, the State did not establish that

the delay in proceeding in juvenile court before the defendant's eighteenth birthday was not beyond its control. In reviewing the decision the court vacated the murder conviction following certification and dismissed the juvenile proceedings for want of jurisdiction. The defect was held to be jurisdictional and no harm analysis was necessary.

²⁶ *Webb v. State*, unpublished, No. 08-00-00161-CR, 2001 WL 1326894, Juvenile Law Newsletter 01-4-45 (Tex. App.—El Paso 10/25/01).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Ex parte Thomas*, 623 S.W.3d 370 (Tex. Crim. App. 2021).

committed the offense alleged.
“Subsection (j) does not require the juvenile court to consider the (f) factors.”²⁹

VII. Certifications for Capital Murder and Murder

Only individuals eighteen or over who are alleged to have committed either Capital Murder or Murder while between the ages of ten and fourteen can be considered for waiver of jurisdiction or certification to adult court.³⁰ This provision of the family code was promulgated by the legislature with the 1999 amendments to the Texas Family Code. The rationale for this provision is that Capital Murder and Murder have no statute of limitations and the juvenile court would have been able to impose a sentence of commitment to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department with a possible transfer to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for up to a forty year term.³¹ Before this legislative change, these offenses would not have been eligible for certification if the person was under fourteen at the time the offense allegedly was committed.

If the State, however, was unable to proceed before the eighteenth birthday of the juvenile the juvenile system could not handle the case because the person was over eighteen, and the adult criminal system would also have no jurisdiction since the offense has original jurisdiction with juvenile court.³²

VIII. Due Process and Constitutional Safeguards

The Supreme Court articulated minimum levels of constitutional protections and due process necessary in juvenile certification proceedings in a landmark series of cases beginning in 1966 with *Kent v. United States*.³³ In *Kent* the Court stated “the waiver hearing must measure up to the essentials of due process and fair treatment.” Prior to *Kent*, the states enacted various legislation to set procedures for juvenile proceedings. However, since juvenile courts were operating under the doctrine of “*parens patriae*” and hearings were deemed civil and not criminal, procedural safeguards afforded adults were vastly lacking in juvenile courts. Beginning with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Kent* and following immediately with *Gault*, the Supreme Court for the first time promulgated constitutional protections applicable to juvenile proceedings. In *Gault*, the Court stated “[j]uvenile court history has again demonstrated that unbridled discretion, however benevolently motivated, is frequently a poor substitute for principle and procedure.”³⁴

Title III of the Texas Family Code has adopted the constitutional mandates of *Kent* and its progeny in affording procedural protections to juvenile respondents in certification hearings.³⁵ Respondents are entitled to due process in that notice of the charges or allegations are required; the right to counsel is not waivable; the right of confrontation is guaranteed; and the privilege against self-incrimination is also upheld as spelled out

²⁹ *Ex parte Thomas*, 623 S.W.3d 370, 378-79 (Tex. Crim. App. 2021).

³⁰ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(j)(2)(A).

³¹ Robert O. Dawson, TEXAS JUVENILE LAW § 10

(9th ed. 2018).

³² See TEX. PEN. CODE § 8.07.

³³ *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. 541 (1966).

³⁴ *In Re Gault*, 387 U.S.1, 18 (1967).

³⁵ See generally, TEX FAM. CODE § 54.02.

in *Kent*.³⁶

IX. Notice of Petition or Motion For Discretionary Transfer

Section 54.02(b) states: “[t]he petition and notice requirements of Sections 53.04, 53.05, 53.06, and 53.07 of this code must be satisfied, and the summons must state that the hearing is for the purpose of considering discretionary transfer to criminal court.”³⁷

The requirements of Section 53.04, mandate that the motion for transfer or petition must state:

(d)(1) with reasonable particularity the time, place, and manner of the acts alleged and the penal law or standard of conduct allegedly violated by the acts;

(d)(2) the name, age, and residence address, if known, of the child who is the subject of the petition;

(d)(3) the names and residence addresses, if known, of the parent, guardian, or custodian of the child and of the child’s spouse, if any;

(d)(4) and if the child’s parent, guardian, or custodian does not reside or cannot be found in the state, or if their places of residence are unknown, the name and residence address of any known adult relative residing in the county, or, if there is none, the name and residence address of the known adult

relative residing nearest to the location of the court.³⁸

Notice to the juvenile’s parents has been considered mandatory.³⁹ In *Carlson v. State*, the court reversed a conviction for Aggravated Assault were the juvenile plead guilty; the court opined that “although service upon a parent is a ‘waivable right’ pursuant to the waiver provisions in Section 53.06(e), no such waiver occurred in this case. Neither of appellant’s parents attended the hearing or waived service of the summons in writing. Since the right to service of the summons was not waived, service upon a parent was mandatory.”⁴⁰ However in 2012 legislative amendments were enacted which excluded parents as a necessary party in cases where the respondent is over eighteen.⁴¹ Additionally, the motion must state “that the hearing is for the purpose of considering discretionary transfer to criminal court.”⁴²

X. Criminal Transaction

Multiple felony offenses pending against the respondent for which there is probable cause can and should be alleged in the same petition to transfer. If the State files a petition which alleges multiple offenses that constitute more than one criminal transaction, the juvenile court may either retain or transfer all offenses relating to each transaction. It is important to note that the juvenile court waives jurisdiction over a transaction, not a specific statutory offense, so the court may transfer or retain

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(b); *See also* Texas Fam. Code § 54.02 (k)(addressing certifications when respondent over eighteen); *See also McBride v. State*, 655 S.W.2d 280 (Tex.App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1983, no writ).

³⁸ TEX. FAM. CODE § 53.04.

³⁹ *Carlson v. State*, 151 S.W.3d 643 (Tex. App.—Eastland 2004).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Tex. Fam. Code § 54.02(k)([t]he person’s parent, custodian, guardian, or guardian ad litem is not considered a party to a proceeding under Subsection (j) and it is not necessary to provide the parent, custodian, guardian, or guardian ad litem with notice.

⁴² TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(b).

different criminal transactions.⁴³ Section 54.02(g) states:

“[i]f the petition alleges multiple offenses that constitute more than one criminal transaction, the juvenile court shall either retain or transfer all offenses relating to a single transaction. A child is not subject to criminal prosecution at any time for any offense arising out of a criminal transaction for which the juvenile court retains jurisdiction.”

Accordingly, if the court retains jurisdiction over any criminal transaction the respondent is not subject to prosecution for any offense for which the court retains jurisdiction.⁴⁴ The State upon receiving the transferred case in criminal court may charge any offense or offenses supported by probable cause as long as the offense arose out of a criminal transaction that was transferred by the juvenile court.⁴⁵ In *Allen*, the Court established the principal that the juvenile court in deciding to waive or transfer jurisdiction assesses the underlying conduct in the waiver hearing. Accordingly, if a respondent is transferred the adult court not only has jurisdiction over the offense transferred and any lesser included offenses but any conduct that resulted from the same criminal transaction.⁴⁶ As a result of the *Allen* principal a respondent transferred to adult court can be prosecuted for any offense the State can prove as long as the offense charged is based on conduct from the criminal transaction from which the juvenile court waived jurisdiction. However, the offense charged by the State

must have been an offense for which the respondent was eligible for certification. For example if a respondent is certified for a criminal transaction which occurred at the age of fourteen only the first degree felony may be prosecuted. These situations would prevent the State from charging any lesser included offenses.⁴⁷

XI. *Diagnostic Study*

Prior to the actual certification hearing the juvenile court is required to order and have completed various evaluations and reports.⁴⁸ Section 54.02(d) provides:

“[p]rior to the hearing, the juvenile court shall order and obtain a complete diagnostic study, social evaluation, and full investigation of the child, his circumstances, and the circumstances of the alleged offense.”⁴⁹

The legislature has not established or expressly stated what must be included in a diagnostic study.⁵⁰ However the purpose of this diagnostic study is to assist the court in determining whether to exercise its discretion to either retain or waive its jurisdiction.

Opinions vary regarding the contents of the diagnostic examination but generally the report is a forensic examination by a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist and social investigation by the juvenile probation department. The report generally addresses such issues as the child's sophistication, maturity,

⁴³ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(g).

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Ex parte Allen*, 618 S.W.2d 357 (Tex. Crim. App. 1981).

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *Ex Parte Allen*, 618 S.W.2d 357 (Tex. Crim. App. 1981); *Livar v. State*, 929 S.W. 2d 573 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1996, pet. ref'd); *Brosky v.*

State, 915 S.W.2d 120 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth, pet. ref'd)

⁴⁷ TEX. CRIM. PROC. CODE § 4.18.

⁴⁸ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(d).

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *R.E.M. v. State*, 532 S.W.2d 645 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1975).

background and family history.⁵¹

The provisions of Section 54.02(d) are mandatory and apply to transfer hearings regardless of the age of the respondent. The only exceptions are certifications where the respondent is over eighteen or the state is seeking automatic or “mandatory” transfer proceedings conducted pursuant to the Texas Family Code.⁵² Since 2013 the court may conduct a certification hearing without a diagnostic study if the State is seeking a transfer pursuant to Texas Family Code 54.02(j) or when the transfer hearing occurs after the respondent’s eighteenth birthday. However, if the respondent requests a diagnostic study then the court is required to order an evaluation.⁵³ If the court fails to order the diagnostic study, evaluation or investigation or to consider the reports in the discretionary transfer hearing the certification hearing is subject to being reversed by a reviewing court.⁵⁴ In *R.E.M. v. State*, the court stated:

Section 54.02(d) is mandatory....

It is impossible to read Title 3 of the Family Code...without reaching the conclusion that its effect is to give to a juvenile offender the right not to be treated as an adult offender unless he is divested of that right by judicial order entered after complying with the requirements set forth in Section 54.02. The necessary conclusion is that, in the absence of an effective waiver by the child, he can be subjected to treatment as an adult only if there has been

compliance with the mandatory provisions of Section 54.02.⁵⁵

Although it is mandatory for the court to order a diagnostic evaluation, the respondent may choose to exercise his Fifth Amendment right and not answer questions. Further, the use of the examination results have limited results in an adult criminal proceeding if a juvenile is certified to stand trial as an adult. When the psychological examination is used both as the basis of the examiner’s determination that the juvenile should be transferred and as a source of incriminating evidence introduced at trial, it requires additional constitutional safeguards.⁵⁶ When used only for its intended purpose, the examination has been held not to be considered a custodial interrogation; however, when the State seeks to use the examination in a subsequent criminal proceeding then the examination serves a dual purpose. In *Cantu v. State*, the court held that notwithstanding the neutral nature of the psychological examination, the statements a juvenile utters during the examination are not automatically removed from the reach of the Fifth Amendment, if a juvenile is not adequately informed of his Fifth Amendment rights with respect to the diagnostic examination or that his testimony during that examination would be used against him in an adjudicatory proceeding, a waiver of his rights is ineffective.⁵⁷

XII. Investigation

Also not defined in certification

⁵¹ For a discussion of what information should be included in the report, see Hays & Solway, *The Role of Psychological Evaluation in Certification of Juveniles for Trial as Adults*, 9 Hous. L. Rev. 709 (1972).

⁵² TEX. FAM. CODE §§ 54.02(l)(n).

⁵³ TEX. FAM. CODE §54.02.(l).

⁵⁴ *R.E.M. v. State*, 532 S.W.2d 645 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1975).

⁵⁵ Robert O. Dawson, TEXAS JUVENILE LAW § 10 (8th ed. 2012)(citing *R.E.M. v. State*, 532 S.W.2d 645 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1975)).

⁵⁶ *Cantu v. State*, 994 S.W.2d 721 (Tex. App.—Austin 1999).

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 735; *See also, Estelle v. Smith*, 451 U.S. 454, 465, 101 S. Ct. 1866, 1874, 68 L. Ed. 2d 359 (1981).

statutes is the term “full investigation of the child, his circumstances, and the circumstances of the alleged offense.”⁵⁸ In looking at this provision one Texas court opined

“[t]he phrase ‘full investigation of the circumstances of the offense’ is not defined in section 54.02. We believe that for good reasons the legislature did not attempt to define the phrase. Of necessity, any inquiry into the circumstances of an offense must be one of degree. It is a matter of common knowledge that the course and scope of an investigation will vary according to the circumstances surrounding the event.”⁵⁹

The certification statutes allow the juvenile court judge to consider and admit written reports from probation officers and other professionals.⁶⁰ The mandatory procedures enunciated in Section 54.02(d) are established with the purpose of

providing the court information sufficient enough to make an informed decision regarding waiving jurisdiction. Although mandatory these procedures must be balanced against the constitutional protections afforded respondents facing transfer to criminal court. Section 54.02(e) seeks to strike a balance by requiring disclosure to counsel for the respondent prior to the certification hearing.⁶¹ Accordingly, an attorney for a child facing transfer or certification must make appropriate and informed decisions regarding when to invoke rights such as the privilege against self-incrimination.⁶² What various courts do seem to suggest is that counsel for defense can assert constitutional protections but cannot then complain on appeal that the required studies or evaluations are incomplete because of his or her own actions.⁶³

XIII. *Hearings*

Certification hearings in Texas are

in a later criminal trial, then the Family Code protections must be provided.

⁶³ In *R.E.M. v. State*, 541 S.W.2d 841 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1976, writ ref'd n.r.e.), the respondent refused to cooperate with the professionals who tried to interview him, then claimed on appeal that the report was incomplete. The court stated: “[w]e are not inclined to hold that the statute requires the accomplishment of that which is impossible due to appellant’s attitude.” *R.E.M.*, 541 S.W.2d at 845. The court in *R.E.M.* held that Texas Family Code 51.09 precluded a waiver of the diagnostic study where the child asserted his right to remain silent, but did not waive his right to the study. Later cases hold that the respondent’s failure to cooperate does not waive the right to the study, but will prevent the child from arguing on appeal that the study was incomplete. See *Ortega v. State*, unpublished, No. 05-00-00086-CR, 2002 WL 14163 (Tex. App.—Dallas 2002); *In the Matter of J.S.C.*, 875 S.W.2d 325 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi 1994, writ dismissed); and *In the Matter of C.C.*, 930 S.W.2d 929 (Tex. App.—Austin 1996, no writ).

⁵⁸ See e.g., *In re I.B.*, 619 S.W.2d 584 (Tex.Civ.App.—Amarillo 1981).

⁵⁹ *In re I.B.*, 619 S.W.2d 584 (Tex. Civ. App.—Amarillo 1981, no writ). See also *Price v. State*, unpublished, No. 05-01-00588-CR, 2002 WL 664129, 2002 Tex. App. Lexis 2852 (Tex.App.—Dallas 4/24/02)(appellant argued that a “full investigation” required the probation department to personally interview the victims or include the respondent’s version of the circumstances of the offense in the report. The appellate court rejected this argument, finding that the court did not abuse its discretion in concluding that a full investigation was performed.)

⁶⁰ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(d).

⁶¹ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(e) requires five day notice to the attorney representing the child and the prosecuting attorney to written reports that will be considered by the court.

⁶² See e.g., *In K.W.M. v. State*, 598 S.W.2d 660 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston[14th Dist.] 1980, no writ) (the court stated that section 54.02(d) does not require a court to order that the child discuss his involvement in the offense, no self-incriminatory statements are required, and if any custodial statement will be used

conducted by the court without a jury.⁶⁴ Specifically, §54.02(c) provides: “[t]he juvenile court shall conduct a hearing without a jury to consider transfer of the child for criminal proceedings.”⁶⁵ The absence of a jury trial is consistent with the dictates of both state and federal law since it has been held that juveniles are not constitutionally entitled to jury trials in juvenile proceedings.⁶⁶ No deprivation of any constitutional right should be construed in the absence of juries in the certification hearing. Although a right to jury is not available in certification hearings, a waiver hearing before the court is mandatory prior to a court exercising its jurisdiction and transferring a respondent to adult criminal court.⁶⁷

Further it has been well settled that certification proceedings are not trials on the merits, but hearings to determine whether the juvenile court will waive its original jurisdiction and transfer the case to adult criminal court for trial or retain its jurisdiction and keep the proceedings in juvenile court.⁶⁸

Right Of Counsel

An attorney can not be waived in a certification proceeding.⁶⁹ It has been held that proceeding with the transfer hearing without the presence of counsel for the

juvenile is reversible error.⁷⁰ It is well established that a juvenile is entitled to the effective assistance of counsel at a certification hearing.⁷¹ In *Kent*, the court stated “[t]he right to representation by counsel is not a formality. It is not a grudging gesture to a ritualistic requirement. It is of the essence of justice.”⁷² The ineffectiveness of counsel in juvenile cases is measured by the *Strickland v. Washington*,⁷³ standard just as in adult criminal cases.

Evidence

The certification statutes do not expressly promulgate the evidentiary procedures which must be adhered to in waiver hearings, however, the Texas Rules of Evidence provides in pertinent part “[e]xcept as otherwise provided by statute, these rules govern civil and criminal proceedings (including examining trials before magistrates) in all courts of Texas, except small claims courts.”⁷⁴

Many courts have opined that the Texas Rules of Evidence are not applicable in certification proceedings; the primary rationale for this position was that the court needed to make a determination as to whether a grand jury would indict. However, with the amendments to the statute effective in 1996 the grand jury

⁶⁴ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(c)

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ See, generally, *McKeiver v. Pennsylvania*, 403 U.S. 528, 533, 91 S. Ct. 1976, 29 L. Ed. 2d 647 (1971); *Strange v. State*, 616 S.W.2d 951; *In the Matter of P.B.C.*, 538 S.W.2d 448, 453 (Tex. Civ. App.—El Paso 1976, no writ).

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *M.A.V., Jr. v. Webb County Court at Law*, 842 S.W.2d 739 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1992, writ denied).

⁶⁹ TEXAS FAM. CODE § 51.10(b)(1).

⁷⁰ *In the Matter of D.L.J.*, 981 S.W.2d 815 (Tex.App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1998, no writ).

⁷¹ See *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. 541, 561-62

(1966); *In re K.J.O.*, 27 S.W.3d 340, 342 (Tex. App.—Dallas 2000, pet. denied).

⁷² *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. at 561.

⁷³ *Strickland v. Washington*, 466 U.S. 668, 687-88 (1984)(whether counsel’s performance fell below an objective standard of reasonableness and, if so, whether a reasonable probability exists that, but for counsel’s unprofessional errors, a different outcome would have resulted.); See also, *In re K.J.O.*, 27 S.W.3d at 343.

⁷⁴ TEX. RULES EVID. 101(b). See also TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.17(c) which apply the Texas Rules of Evidence applicable to criminal cases in juvenile proceedings.

provision was repealed.⁷⁵ The issue of hearsay as well as the application of the Sixth Amendment Confrontation clause in certification hearings have been addressed by some appellate courts.⁷⁶ However, neither of the state's highest courts, the Texas Supreme Court or Court of Criminal Appeals, have yet to address this issue. It is settled that Texas Rules of Evidence applicable to criminal cases are to be used in certification proceedings.⁷⁷

XIV. Factors To Be Considered By The Court

In the seminal case, *Kent v. United States*, the Supreme Court articulated factors which were determinative in addressing whether a judge should waive its jurisdiction and transfer a case to adult criminal court.⁷⁸ The factors articulated by the Court were

1. The seriousness of the alleged offense to the community and whether the protection of the community requires waiver.
2. Whether the alleged offense was committed in an aggressive, violent, premeditated or willful manner.
3. Whether the alleged offense was against persons or against property, greater weight being given to offenses against persons especially if personal injury resulted.

4. The prosecutive merit of the complaint, i.e., whether there is evidence upon which a Grand Jury may be expected to return an indictment (to be determined by consultation with the United States Attorney).

5. The desirability of trial and disposition of the entire offense in one court when the juvenile's associates in the alleged offense are adults who will be charged with a crime in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

6. The sophistication and maturity of the juvenile as determined by consideration of his home, environmental situation, emotional attitude and pattern of living.

7. The record and previous history of the juvenile, including previous contacts with the Youth Aid Division, other law enforcement agencies, juvenile courts and other jurisdictions, prior periods of probation to this Court, or prior commitments to juvenile institutions.

8. The prospects for adequate protection of the public and the likelihood of reasonable rehabilitation of the juvenile (if he is found to have committed the alleged offense) by the use of procedures, services and facilities

⁷⁵ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(f)(3) repealed.

⁷⁶ See generally, *Milligan v. State*, No. 03-04-00531-CR, 2006 Tex. App. Lexis 1356, (Tex. App.—Austin 2/16/06) (Neither Sixth Amendment nor Crawford confrontation rights apply at the juvenile certification hearing); *In re S.M.*, 207 S.W.3d 421 (Tex. App. — Fort Worth 2006, pet. (Crawford v. Washington does not apply to determinate sentence transfer hearings since they are not a critical stage of a criminal prosecution) *c.f.* *In the Matter of M.P.*, No. 10-06-00008-CV, 2007 Tex.

App. Lexis—Waco, 2/7/07)(Court held that a juvenile has no Sixth Amendment or Article I, Section 10 of the Texas Constitution right of confrontation during a disposition hearing however, he does have a limited right of confrontation under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which requires a balancing test).

⁷⁷ TEX. FAM. CODE § 51.17 (c).

⁷⁸ *U.S. v. Kent* 383 U.S. at 566-567.

currently available to the Juvenile Court.⁷⁹

The Texas provision of the certification statute §54.02(f) adopts and incorporates the *Kent* factors which were promulgated to provide constitutional safeguards to juvenile respondents in transfer hearings.⁸⁰ Section 54.02(f) requires the juvenile court to consider the following factors in making the decision to waive jurisdiction:

1. whether the alleged offense was against person or property, with greater weight in favor of transfer given to offenses against the person;
2. the sophistication and maturity of the child;
3. the record and previous history of the child; and
4. the prospects of adequate protection of the public and the likelihood of the rehabilitation of the child by use of procedures, services, and facilities currently available to the juvenile court.⁸¹

This list is not exhaustive, in that the court may consider other factors which it deems appropriate in determining whether to transfer a case to criminal court. However, the court must “consider” the statutory factors in making its determination.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. 541, 561-62 (1966)

⁸¹ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(a). The legislative changes which took effect in January 1, 1996, eliminated two factors: whether the offense was committed in an aggressive and premeditated manner and whether there was evidence on which a grand jury could be expected to return an indictment.

⁸² See e.g.; *Moon v. State*, 410 S.W.3d 466 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist] (2013) (holding “In sum, we find the evidence legally insufficient to support the juvenile court's finding related to Moon's sophistication and maturity. We also find the

XV. *Judicial Findings*

Cameron Moon was sixteen years old when he was detained and charged with murder. The prosecuting attorney sought certification and transfer to adult court. In a contested transfer hearing the State called one witness at the hearing: the detective who investigated the case. The detective's testimony outlined his investigation of the murder and his interrogation of Cameron. Additionally the State introduced an offense report for a referral for a criminal mischief offense and a report from the juvenile probation department which detailed a physical exam of Cameron.⁸³ Cameron was certified and transferred to adult court where he was tried and convicted of murder and sentenced to thirty years in the Texas Department of Corrections (TDCJ). Cameron appealed his conviction and in 2013 the First District Court of Appeals in Houston reversed his conviction and held that the juvenile court's finding that there was little, if any, prospect of rehabilitation of Cameron or adequate protection of the public was so against the evidence introduced at the transfer hearing as to be manifestly unjust and an abuse of the juvenile court's discretion. In 2014 the Court of Criminal Appeals affirmed the appellate court decision and issued its opinion in *Moon v. State*.⁸⁴ In *Moon* the Court of Criminal

evidence factually insufficient to support the court's finding regarding the prospect of adequate protection of the public and the likelihood of Moon's rehabilitation. Thus, the first factor—whether the offense was against person or property—is the only factor weighing in favor of Moon's transfer. *In the Matter of J.R.C.*, 551 S.W.2d 748 (Tex.Civ.App.—Texarkana 1977, writ ref'd n.r.e.)

⁸³ *Moon v. State*, 451 S.W.3d 28, 31 (Tex. Crim. App. 2014) *rev'd Ex parte Thomas*, 623 S.W.3d 370 (Tex. Crim. App. 2021).

⁸⁴ *Id.*

Appeals opined that “in deciding the ultimate issue of determining whether the seriousness of the offense alleged or the background of the juvenile requires criminal proceedings a juvenile court must have some evidence to support its findings regarding transfer.⁸⁵ The Court of Criminal Appeals revisited the United Supreme Court’s decision in *Kent v. United States* where the Court opined “there is no place in our system of law for reaching a result of such tremendous consequences without ceremony -- without hearing, without effective assistance of counsel, without a statement of reasons. It is inconceivable that a court of justice dealing with adults, with respect to a similar issue, would proceed in this manner. It would be extraordinary if society's special concern for children...permitted this procedure. We hold that it does not.”⁸⁶ However, *Moon* has been short-lived.⁸⁷ In a recent decision the Court of Criminal Appeals expressly overruled *Moon*.⁸⁸ So what’s left of *Moon*? As the Court stated in *Moon* “[n]othing.”⁸⁹ The Court opined in *Moon* that “*Moons* holding was both jurisdictional and wrong.” “As discussed, the requirement of case-specific fact-findings to support the reasons for the transfer are not required by the text of the statute or constitutional precedent.

To the extent that *Moon* establishes a new standard of review for sufficiency of a juvenile transfer order on direct appeal, that standard was tied to the requirement that the trial court enter case-specific fact findings justifying the transfer of jurisdiction. Without *Moon's* requirement of case-specific fact-finding, that type of sufficiency review is unworkable.”

⁸⁵ *Id.* At 57.

⁸⁶ *Kent v. United States*, 383 U.S. 541, 554 (1966).

⁸⁷ *Ex parte Thomas*, 623 S.W.3d 370 (Tex. Crim. App. 2021).

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Ex parte Thomas* at 381.

XVI. *Required Findings*

There are five basic requirements that must be established before the juvenile court may waive its jurisdiction. Prior to transfer the court must make the following findings:

- 1.) the child is alleged to have committed a felony;
- 2.) the child was: fourteen or older at the time he or she allegedly committed a capital felony, an aggravated controlled substance felony, or a first degree felony, or fifteen or older at the time he or she allegedly committed any other felony;
- 3.) no adjudication hearing has been conducted concerning the offense;
- 4.) there is probable cause to believe that the child before the court committed the alleged offense; and
- 5.) because of the seriousness of the offense or the background of the child, the welfare of the community requires criminal proceedings.⁹⁰

If the court is proceeding under a hearing where the respondent is over eighteen the court must make the findings pursuant to §54.02(j) which includes a finding of due diligence.⁹¹ The burden is on the State to prove the allegations in the petition or motion for discretionary transfer by a preponderance of the evidence.

⁹⁰ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(f).

⁹¹ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(j) See also *Ex parte Thomas*, 623 S.W.3d 370 (Tex. Crim. App. 2021)(Court of Criminal Appeals holding that under 54.02(j) the factors under 54.02(f) are not required.

XVII. Community Welfare Provision

Of most important in a court's consideration to transfer a juvenile to adult court is whether the evidence dictates that the welfare of the community requires transfer to adult criminal court.⁹² This finding will be reviewed by an appellate court on legal and factual sufficiency grounds.⁹³ If the evidence is deemed legally insufficient on appellate review the respondent may not be transferred to adult court since judgment should be rendered for the respondent and the waiver petition dismissed with prejudice.⁹⁴

XVIII. Criminal Transaction

When a juvenile court waives its jurisdiction and transfers a juvenile respondent to adult criminal court it is not actually transferring the respondent for all purposes. In essence what the juvenile court is waiving is jurisdiction for a particular criminal conduct or transaction.⁹⁵ Section 54.02(g) of the Family Code states “[i]f the petition alleges multiple offenses that constitute more than one criminal transaction, the juvenile court shall either retain or transfer all offenses relating to a single transaction. A child is not subject to criminal prosecution at any time for any offense arising out of a criminal transaction for which the juvenile court retains jurisdiction.”⁹⁶

XIX. Mandatory Certification

The third basic type of certification

in Texas is often referred to as “mandatory certification.”⁹⁷ The mandatory provisions were enacted with the advent of the legislative changes in 1995. The provisions of the code establishing the mandatory transfer proceedings basically codifies the doctrine or practice of “once certified always certified.” Although the statute is commonly referred to as mandatory certification the process is not automatic and not all inclusive. The prosecutor has discretion whether to seek a mandatory transfer or not. However, if the State does seek transfer under this provision and the requirements of the statute are complied with, the juvenile court must transfer the case. Mandatory transfer requires:

1. the child was previously transferred to criminal court for criminal proceedings; and
2. the child has allegedly committed a new felony offense before becoming seventeen years old.

The mandatory transfer provision do not apply if at the time of the transfer hearing:

1. the child was not indicted by the grand jury in the matter transferred;
2. the child was found not guilty in the matter transferred;
3. the matter transferred was dismissed with prejudice; or
4. the child was convicted in the matter transferred, the conviction was reversed on appeal, and the appeal is final.⁹⁸

Of major importance to this

⁹² TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(a)(3).

⁹³ *Green v. State*, unpublished, No. 05-97-01176-CR, 1999 WL 783734, 1999 Tex. App. Lexis 7328, Juvenile Law Newsletter 99-4-14 (Tex.App.—Dallas 10/4/99).

⁹⁴ See generally, *In the Matter of A.T.S.*, 694 S.W.2d 252 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1985 (Appellate Court held evidence did not support transfer hearing since

offense committed was crime of “juvenile nature”).
⁹⁵ See, *Ex Parte Allen*, 618 S.W.2d 357 (Tex. Crim. App. 1981).

⁹⁶ TEX. FAM. CODE §54.02(g).

⁹⁷ TEX. FAM. CODE §54.02(m).

⁹⁸ TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(m).

provision is the requirement that the respondent was previously certified to adult court and a valid transfer order exists and a new felony offense is alleged.⁹⁹ Additionally, the case which the respondent was previously certified to adult court must be final and not have resulted in an acquittal, dismissal prior to indictment, no billed or reversed on appeal.¹⁰⁰

Once the statutory provisions are met transfer to adult court is mandatory; hence the term “mandatory certification.” These procedures were designed to expedite the transfer process and increase judicial economy.¹⁰¹ This streamlined process does away with the requirements of obtaining a complete diagnostic study, social investigation and investigation of the child and the circumstances of the alleged offense. Although the statute calls for an extremely streamlined process and does not address additional proof requirements it should be concluded that probable cause demonstrating the respondent committed a felony offense would still be necessary to be shown by the State.¹⁰²

XX. Orders

Although courts are required to give its reasons for transfer in its order it is well settled that juvenile courts have wide latitude in determining whether to retain or waive jurisdiction in a certification proceeding.¹⁰³ In reviewing a court’s order to transfer a reviewing court will defer to the trial court’s findings.

XXI. Miscellaneous Transfers

Two essentially identical provisions of the juvenile mental health statutes allow for “automatic” transfer of certain cases to adult criminal court.¹⁰⁴ These statutes state that the juvenile court shall transfer all pending proceedings from the juvenile court to a criminal court on the eighteenth birthday of a child for whom the juvenile court or a court to which the child’s case is referred under Section 55.12(2) has ordered inpatient mental health services if:

- a. The child is not discharged or furloughed from the inpatient mental health facility before reaching eighteen years of age; and
- b. The child is alleged to have engaged in delinquent conduct that included a violation of a penal law listed in Section 53.045 and no adjudication concerning the alleged conduct has been made.¹⁰⁵

These provisions require juveniles charged with offenses under the Determinate Sentence Act who remain confined under a commitment order at the age of eighteen to be transferred to adult court. Section 55.44 permits adult criminal proceedings when the respondent is competent to stand trial after age eighteen and is charged with an offense under the Determinate Sentence Act. There has been minimal use or litigation of these provisions however the juvenile court has no discretion in its application.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ See generally, TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(n).

¹⁰² TEX. FAM. CODE § 54.02(a)(3); *Kent v. United States* 557; Robert O. Dawson, TEXAS JUVENILE LAW § 10 (8th ed. 2012).

¹⁰³ See generally, TEX. FAM. CODE §54.02(h).

¹⁰⁴ See, TEX. FAM. CODE §§ 55.19, 55.44; Robert O. Dawson, TEXAS JUVENILE LAW § 10 (8th ed. 2012).

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ TEX. FAM. CODE §55.44.

XXII. Appeals

A juvenile respondent has a right to appeal the decision of a juvenile court transferring jurisdiction to adult court. Prior to the 1995 legislative changes to the Family Code direct appeals to the Court of Appeals, then possible review by the Texas Supreme Court were available.¹⁰⁷ Effective with offenses occurring after January 1, 1996, the right to take a direct appeal from a certification order was eliminated.¹⁰⁸ Beginning in September 1, 2015, Texas law once again allows direct appeal of juvenile certifications.¹⁰⁹

XXIII. Conclusion

Juvenile courts in Texas have original jurisdiction of offenses committed by juveniles over the age of ten and younger than seventeen. Texas does however allow for procedures to have certain cases removed or transferred from juvenile court to a criminal district court. Certifications or discretionary transfer of juveniles in Texas account for roughly one percent of all juvenile referrals; although this total comprises a relatively small number of juvenile proceedings, these hearings are of utmost importance. Upon transfer to adult court the juvenile protections and safeguards which have been mandated in Texas law since the *Gault* decision are lost and adult provisions and statutes become applicable.

¹⁰⁷ TEX. FAM. CODE § 56.01(c)(1).

¹⁰⁸ TEX. FAM. CODE § 56.01(c)(1)(A), which had authorized a direct appeal from an order of transfer, was repealed. See e.g., *Silva v. State*, ___ S.W.3d ___, No. 01-06-00031-CR, 2007 Tex. App. Lexis 3698

(Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 5/10/07), *Rodriguez v. State*, 191 S.W.3d 909 (Tex. App.—Dallas 2006).

¹⁰⁹ See TEX. FAM. CODE §56.01.